

SCOPING STATEMENT WESTSIDE IRRIGATION DISTRICT LAND CONVEYANCE PROJECT

**Westside Irrigation District,
and
Bureau of Land Management, Worland Field Office
and
Wyoming Water Development Commission**

Description of Project

Public Law 106-485 (Nov. 9, 2000; 114 Stat. 2199) directs the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the Bureau of Land Management, to convey all right, title and interest (excluding mineral interest) in a parcel of public land in Big Horn County and Washakie County, Wyoming. The parcel of land to be conveyed comprises approximately 16,500 acres (see map). Conveyance is to be made to the Westside Irrigation District, at appraised value. It is anticipated that the land would then be re-sold to private individuals for agricultural purposes in parcels no less than 160 acres per individual. Individuals qualifying for purchase of the lands from the District would be selected through a lottery. Successful individuals and the lands they acquire would become members of the District. Lands would be selected that are irrigable and that avoid impacts to wildlife, recreation, sensitive environmental areas, and other land uses. The District would make sufficient modifications in their irrigation infrastructure to allow for irrigation of the selected parcels.

The sale to the District is to take place after “completion of an environmental analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act” (NEPA) by the Worland Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The law authorizing transfer of the land specifies that acreage may be added to or subtracted from the original 16,500 acres to satisfy any mitigation requirements resulting from the NEPA analysis. Finally, the law provides that proceeds from the sale are to be used “for the acquisition of land and interests in land in the Worland District of the Bureau of Land Management that will benefit public recreation, public access, fish and wildlife habitat, or cultural resources.”

Project Collaboration

Co-Lead Agency for the preparation of the NEPA document will be the Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC). The WWDC will use the document in support of any future funding decisions should the Westside Irrigation District file an application with the Commission for water supply development assistance. Such requests must be received by September 15th of each year for consideration in the next funding cycle. The WWDC then considers such applications and makes recommendations to the legislature. Approved projects become part of the omnibus water planning bill to be considered during the next session of the Wyoming State Legislature. If approved by the legislature, the bill goes before the Governor for his final approval.

Cooperators identified to date include the Big Horn County Commission and the Washakie County Commission.

Relationship to Existing Plans and Documents

The document which directs management of federal lands within the project area is the Grass Creek Resource Management Plan (GCRMP) and Record of Decision approved in 1998.

The GCRMP states that landownership adjustments by sale would be considered on a case-by-case basis, following criteria and factors established in Appendix 4 of the Plan. In considering any sale, “BLM will consult with county commissioners and other representatives of local government in the affected areas. Other affected and interested citizens will be given opportunities to comment as well.” Scoping is the first opportunity for public involvement. There will be other opportunities throughout the NEPA process. Currently, the BLM is consulting with the County Commissioners and soliciting public comments on the scope of the NEPA analysis.

National Environmental Policy Act

Public Law 106-485 requires that the proposed lease be analyzed in accordance with the requirements of NEPA. To comply with NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations, which implement NEPA, the BLM is required to prepare an environmental analysis. The environmental document will serve several purposes. It will provide both the public and governmental agencies with information about the potential environmental consequences of the project and alternatives; identify all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the project and alternatives; and provide the responsible official with information upon which to make an informed decision regarding the project. The document will be prepared by an Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) of BLM resource experts, supported by a third-party contractor.

One essential element of the NEPA process is scoping. Scoping activities are initiated early in the process to:

- identify reasonable alternatives to be evaluated in the environmental analysis;
- identify environmental issues of concern related to the proposed sale;
- determine the depth of analysis for issues addressed in the environmental document; and
- identify potential mitigation.

This scoping statement has been prepared to describe means by which governmental agencies, the general public, and other interested parties may participate in and contribute to the analysis process. Public input is important in establishing the scope of analysis for any NEPA document, and the BLM encourages public participation.

Scoping Meetings

Public meetings will be held to provide interested members of the public with further information about the proposed sale and their opportunities to submit scoping comments to BLM.

The meetings will be conducted in open-house format. The public will have the opportunity to meet with BLM and WWDC specialists, and representatives of the project proponent. Maps and other documents will be available for review. Comment forms will be provided. Comments can be submitted at the meeting, or sent in later.

The meetings will be held at the following times and locations:

August 3, 2004 4:00 – 7:00 PM BLM – Worland Field Office 101 S. 23rd Worland, WY	August 4, 2004 4:00 – 7:00 PM Big Horn County Courthouse 420 W. C Street Basin, WY
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Timing Requirements

Public input is important in establishing the level and scope of the analysis. The public is encouraged to participate throughout the environmental analysis process to help in identifying the level of analysis needed, alternatives to the proposed action, other issues or concerns that should be analyzed, mitigation opportunities, and any other comments or ideas to help ensure the completeness of the analysis process.

Comments are due by **August 23, 2004**. Please submit your comments to:

Don Ogaard, Project Manager
BLM – Worland Field Office
PO Box 119
Worland, WY 82401

307.347.5160

E-mail: wymail_westside@blm.gov

Project documents and information can be found at: <http://www.wy.blm.gov/nepa/wfodocs/westside>

Initial Mailing List

The scoping notice initial mailing distribution includes the following agencies, officials, and organizations:

Government Offices

Office of the Governor
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Wyoming Department of Transportation
Wyoming State Planning Coordinator
Wyoming State Engineer
Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality
Wyoming Geological Survey
Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission
Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Wyoming Business Council
Wyoming Department of Agriculture
Wyoming Department of Revenue
Office of State Lands and Investments
State Trails Program
Wyoming Travel and Tourism
State Historic Preservation Officer
City of Worland
Town of Basin
Town of Manderson

Elected Officials

U.S. Congresswoman Barbara Cubin
(Chris Lyon, Field Representative)
U.S. Senator Mike Enzi
(Karen McCreery, Field Representative)
U.S. Senator Craig Thomas
(Pam Buline, Field Representative)
State Senator Gerald Geis
State Representative Jane Wostenburg
State Representative Michael Baker

Native American Tribes

Shoshone Business Council
Arapaho Business Council
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes
Ute Tribal Council
Crow Tribal Council
Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council
Oglala Sioux Tribal Council
Rosebud Sioux Tribal Council
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Council

Public Land Users and User Groups

Western Land Exchange Project
Wyoming Outdoor Council
Wyoming Chapter – Sierra Club
Western Watersheds Project

A media release regarding the project was also sent to all Bighorn Basin and many statewide print and electronic media outlets.

Bill Hill, Field Manager

**Bureau of Land Management
Worland Field Office
P.O. Box 119
Worland, WY 82401**

**Lawrence M. Besson, Director
Charles Murray, Chairman**

**Wyoming Water Development Commission
6920 Yellowtail Road
Cheyenne, WY 82002**